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A DEPARTURE IN CONSTRUCTIVE PUBLIC HYGIENE¹

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The influx of people who make their permanent homes in the large cities, the rapid material development of these great centers, and the specialization in all fields of labor, give rise to many questions concerning the preservation of life and health of these people.

To enlarge upon this thought is only to repeat what Doctors Sargent and Gulick have written from the physical training point of view, and what Jacob Riis, Jane Addams, and others, have told us from the sociological aspect of the subject.

The rapid strides we have made in sanitation have done much to make the city a safe place in which to live. Caring for our people *en masse*, with proper sanitation, to caring for them more individually by means of the hygienic agencies of physical exercise and bathing, is but a short and logical step, and one which we believe should be taken as fully and as rapidly as possible in every community. In this latter respect our public schools seem to lead, as we see school systems everywhere making more and more extensive provision for physical training. Public school physical training, however, no matter how excellent, is inadequate when it is confined, as is usually the case, to the classroom and the four walls of a small gymnasium.

There must be extensive facilities for unconscious physical training, and for bathing, if the physical and social advancement which we believe to be necessary, is to be obtained among our common people. Statistics show that the vast majority of children leave school at, or soon after, the grammar-school period. It is open to doubt that the amount and kind of physical training

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received in the grammar grades produces results of more than the merest temporary nature.

The persistent appeal everywhere, for more and better facilities for physical training in the high schools, indicates that we are not yet prepared to give even a small number of children of the school age an adequate physical training service. And in our schemes of physical training, what becomes of the vast number of children not in the schools? There is no more pitiable sight in our great cities than the boys and girls whose playtime has been cut short by the necessity for work in office, factory, or shop, there to become a cog in the machinery of modern specialization in labor. This is a class in as great need of physical training activities as the student class.

The South Park Commissioners of Chicago are endeavoring to meet the problem of an adequate physical training service for all the people in the South Park district, and are thereby incidentally demonstrating the possibility of park boards leading the way in matters of constructive public hygiene. I do not mean to say that park boards are likely to lead the way in research work in public hygiene, but the South Park system of Chicago, indicates the possibility of park boards leading the way in making use of the store of knowledge gained by experiences and experiments in schools and under health boards. Park boards have large grounds and money, and are well able to start the wheels of legislation in favor of public hygienic agencies.

To accomplish what has been done by the South Park Commissioners of Chicago needs only a non-political park board, composed of "big" men and a park superintendent who loves to achieve things for the public good, and not for a political gang.

In that portion of Chicago known as the South Park district, the South Park Commissioners are constructing fourteen new parks, ranging in size from ten to three hundred acres. Each park site has been selected with special reference to density of population, location of schools, and other factors of similar nature. In each of twelve of these parks a field house is erected, costing on an average \$90,000, exclusive of equipment. Each field house contains separate gymnasiums for men and women, locker

rooms, shower and plunge baths. Each field house also contains an assembly hall, office, reading room, rooms for neighborhood clubs, lavatories, and toilet rooms, a laundry, and a refectory where pure foods, modified and sterilized milk are sold at cost.

The men's gymnasiums contain basket-ball and hand-ball courts, traveling and flying rings, stall bars, bucks, jump standards, jump boards, mats, especially designed horizontal, vaulting and parallel bars, climbing ropes, miscellaneous equipment for games, and an instructor's movable platform and chest.

The women's gymnasiums contain stall bars, flying rings, a basket-ball court, bucks, mats, jump boards, jump standards, Swedish ladders, specially designed Swedish boom and bar saddles, miscellaneous equipment for games, and an instructor's movable platform and chest.

Competent men and women, graduates of normal schools, are employed to take charge of the men's and women's gymnasiums respectively.

Six thousand steel lockers are installed in the locker rooms, and the women's locker rooms are amply supplied with dressing booths as well as with steel lockers. All lockers are equipped with devices making it possible to use any one of three locks—a combination, rim, or padlock.

The outdoor space is divided and used as follows: The central portion of each park is laid out as a "flat," or large field for football and baseball. A twelve-foot cement walk surrounds most of these fields for roller skating. In winter the fields are flooded for ice skating.

In two of the sixty-acre parks lagoons are being made, and a fleet of row boats will be launched and ready for use this summer.

On the side of the park next to the men's locker room is a cinder running-track, with a "straight-away for the sprints and hurdles." The tracks range in size from one-eighth to one-fourth mile to the lap. They are completely equipped for all sorts of track and field work. At one end of the running track inclosure there is a large iron pipe frame containing gymnastic apparatus in sets of eight. In winter, toboggan slides are erected in the running track inclosures.

On the side of the park next to the women's locker room is a space set apart for out-door work for women. This space is amply equipped with gymnastic and play apparatus.

Beyond the women's gymnasium is a space set apart for the exclusive use of small children. This space is equipped with suitable gymnastic and play apparatus. A large wading pool, surrounded by sand courts, is also a part of the equipment for small children.

The running-tracks, women's gymnasium, and children's playgrounds are surrounded by iron fences, and each group has the exclusive use of a space for such activities as are of special interest to the group.

Each park has a large open-air swimming-pool, surrounded by sand-courts of large dimensions, thus bringing the bathing beach to the people in the city. The smallest pool is about 4,000 square feet; and the largest is about 35,000 square feet.

The matter of lighting the parks, the planting of trees and shrubbery, the laying out of walks, fences, lawns, etc., has been treated in most artistic and practical fashion, and all combine to make a beautiful and an attractive place for all physical activities.

Before an attempt had been made to lay out a detailed plan of work, the buildings had been planned and the dimensions and character of the structure of the gymnasiums had been determined, so the plan of work and the equipment selected has reference to these factors as well as to what is considered the physical training needs of the community.

A tentative plan of work has been laid out for both in-door and out-door activities.

During the in-door season, work in the gymnasium is conducted somewhat as follows: Early in the afternoon classes are organized for small children, and later in the afternoon for larger boys and girls. In the evening, school children are excluded, and classes are conducted for working boys and girls and adults in general.

The program for men and boys consists of marching evolutions (confined to the school of the company); free exercises, selected primarily for their hygienic effects, and free exercises

selected primarily for their corrective influences. A scheme of progressive mat and very simple tumbling exercises is used for both boys and men.

In addition to the above mass class work, squad work upon the apparatus is conducted, and special efforts are made to put to fullest use all in-door games and the development of group games.

The plan of work for girls and women is much the same as that outlined for boys, except that dancing steps take the place of mat and tumbling exercises, and apparatus work is of a different character.

Dumb-bells, wands, Indian clubs, and chest weights have been omitted from the equipment, and their use from the plan of work.

Aside from the advantage gained in having all walls free of this apparatus, and consequent obstruction when playing games, the omission of the so-called calisthenic drill enables us to lay special emphasis upon a slightly different character of work from that pursued in the schools. In this way we hope to supplement and enrich the school program for school children, as well as to offer work calculated to meet the needs of the adult population.

In order to make the gymnasiums as nearly "fool proof" as possible, all pieces of apparatus are locked in place or up out of reach, so that improper use of apparatus and danger of injury in the absence of the instructors is reduced to the minimum.

To encourage systematic work, the entire change of clothing when exercising, and attention to bathing, lockers are, and gymnasium suits may be, furnished free of cost or deposit money to those who register and report for regular class work. As there is a laundry in each building, all gymnasium and bathing suits will be laundered at regular intervals, free of cost. Towels are furnished free of cost to all bathers, and no towels are allowed to hang in the lockers.

During the winter months the assembly halls will be used frequently for demonstrating gymnastic work, and for lectures on physical training, and related subjects.

The plan for out-door work contemplates instruction on the gymnastic apparatus, the organization of baseball, football, and

track teams. In addition to holding numerous graded contests in each park, a league will be formed comprising all the parks, and inter-park contests will be held in all branches of sport in their seasons. The same amount and kind of supervision will be given to the activities of the girl's gymnasiums and to the small children's playgrounds.

No efforts are made, at the present time, to conduct aquatic sports, but the swimming pools are open daily for the freest possible use. Bathing suits and towels are furnished free of cost.

All lockers and locker rooms are disinfected periodically, and special efforts are made to keep the bathing suits, gymnasium clothes, swimming pools, and sand-courts in a perfectly sanitary condition.

Four parks are now open and are being extensively used by the public. Six more parks will be ready for use in August.

In the autumn of this year the South Park district of Chicago will be supplied with a system of public gymnasiums, baths, swimming pools, and playgrounds that will rival the ancient Greek institutions of similar character.

Chicago, more than any other American city, has grown so rapidly that there has been little or no time for correlation of the units of public service. We shall, it is hoped, some day reach a period when the unification of the efforts and expenditures for physical and social advancement of our people will take place. At such a time, the physical training departments of the public schools and parks might be brought together under one comprehensive system. Conscious physical training might be carried on in the schools without the use of many expensive gymnasiums — the school children obtaining their unconscious and informal physical training in the parks, after school hours, and under either (or both) school or park instructors.

Here is perhaps an economical as well as an ideal solution of a great and complex problem of the modern city.

The juvenile courts of our great cities are institutions of recent origin and of positive value to society. The great problem of the juvenile court is what to do with the boy or girl when convicted of an offense. Isolated institutions where such children are cared for under the direction of the court are so rapidly filled

that a startling economical problem soon presents itself. Here again a unification of the agencies for physical and social betterment might work a solution of a great and complex problem, ever growing more complex. Under a unified system such children might be parolled to the school at stated hours, to the park gymnasium, natatorium, playgrounds, and pure food restaurant at other stated hours, and to one other public institution to sleep and eat. Such an environment would be likely to defy positively bad heredity.

To enlarge upon the thought of a unified public service for physical and social advancement, we have only to pass in review the city police force composed of fat and slovenly units, and how an hour each day spent in the park gymnasium, natatorium and athletic field would make the policeman a better appearing, and more efficient public servant. A unified system would require our firemen to exercise and bathe daily, and thus maintain a high standard of physical efficiency. Our militia organization would be better prepared to serve state or nation if weekly drills in military gymnastics and athletics were a part of the training of these organizations.

Thus we see the possibilities of the park gymnasias. The work now being done in these gymnasias is truly constructive in the fullest sense of the word.

Children are taken from the streets and alleys and given a better environment and safer place in which to play. Parents, truck drivers, policemen, and others involved in the care of children are relieved of anxiety and care. Working boys, girls and adults are encouraged to spend their idle hours in a wholesome environment and away from questionable amusements.

Both children and adults are encouraged to give attention to personal hygiene—exercise, and bathing especially.

Wholesome amusement is furnished to those who do not participate in the activities of the gymnasium and athletic field. Bent frames are “set up;” physical skill, courage, and a wholesome respect for the rights of, and respect for, others are acquired.

In fine, there is, perhaps, no other public institution better calculated to raise the standards of good citizenship, and this is by common consent the problem of the great city.